

Historic, archived document

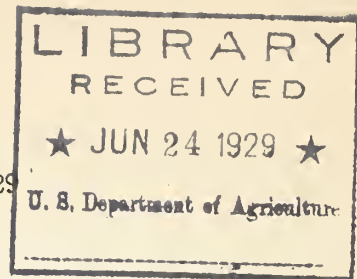
Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

A Forestlogue

NBC Radio Network - June 12, 1929

By

H. N. Wheeler
U.S. Forest Service



A doctor said to a man, "Your wife's mind is gone - completely gone." The man replied, "I don't doubt it a bit. She has been giving me a piece of it every day for the past fifteen years."

Our timber is not all gone but it is disappearing piece by piece faster than it is being grown. Let us have a look at some of the forests and potential forest lands of our country, and see how they stand and what they can do. The whole forestry question is one of land use rather than simply a problem of growing and harvesting timber. It involves the best use of 470,000,000 acres of land in the U. S. A. once all timbered, but now containing approximately 100,000,000 idle, waste, non-producing acres, and many millions of other acres poorly or only partly stocked with timber. It involves additional millions of acres once farmed but now eroded and gullied so they can no longer be farmed. But they will produce timber. There are such idle, practically non-producing acres on every farm, even in the prairie sections of this country.

No one can afford idle cows in the dairy herd, nor idle men on the farm, or in the State. So idle acres have no place on the farm or in the State, at large. Idle acres return nothing to the owner, support no schools, or pay no taxes to the State. We need the timber products these acres can produce, such as firewood, lumber, fenceposts, railroad ties, newspapers and even the Rayon for our clothing.

But these so-called economic values are less important in some regions, than the growing of timber on these partly forested and idle acres for other purposes, such as watershed protection. Trees and brush hold back water from a too rapid run-off on steep slopes; and leaves, twigs, and decaying wood on the forest floor keep the soil moist and porous permitting the water to sink into the soil instead of running off the surface. This growing vegetation also holds the soil from going down stream to fill up rivers and reservoirs. Trees and shrubs growing on sloping shores will hold the soil and extend the life of the reservoirs. Soil erosion is a problem of the first magnitude. Acres in Texas and Missouri according to the Bureau of Soils are losing 40 tons of soil per acre per year, and the same is true to a lesser degree in each of the other States. Barren clay hill tops, gullies and ravines, and steep hill slopes of little value for general farming purposes will make a fine financial return if devoted to timber growth.

Where seed trees are lacking on this poorly forested and idle land, planting must be done. Thirty-three States in the Union have State owned

nurseries where trees may be secured at a nominal cost. Some owners of timber lands have their own nurseries. Where nut trees and oaks are desired the nuts and acorns should be planted in the spots where the individual trees are desired so as to avoid transplanting at some expense and loss of trees. The Black Locust is especially valuable in checking erosion and in bringing nitrogen into the soil. Its wood is especially good for fence posts, cross arm pins, etc., and brings a net return according to recent surveys, of from \$11.00 to \$30.00 per acre per year. A Missouri farmer, obliged to cut an osage hedge found the trees netted him \$10.00 an acre per year for all the time they had been growing. Cottonwood, according to the Iowa State Experiment Station, has yielded on waste and overflow land from \$5.67 per acre per year to \$10.00 per acre per year. Senator Rainey of Tennessee sold 14 year old trees on part of a 5 acre plantation of black locust, at 35 cents per tree, and had he sold all the trees on the 5 acres he would have netted \$400.00 per acre for the 14 years. Black walnut, hickory, ash, other hardwood trees and many pines and spruces will bring a fine monetary return for these idle acres. Is not the forestry question then, partly at least, a farmer's problem?

But while it is important that these waste farm lands and farmers' woodlands be made fully productive, the whole forestry question is much bigger and wider in scope. Private forestry must be encouraged in every legitimate way possible, but a nation-wide forestry program that will put to use the 470,000,000 acres of forest land requires that large areas must be placed in public forests. The National forests of the west hold an important position in this forestry program but do not solve the problem for the region east of the Rocky Mountains. It is true that under the Weeks Act, and later the Clarke-McNary Law, about 3,500,000 acres have been acquired and placed in National Forests in this region, and in addition there are National Forests in Arkansas, Florida, Minnesota and Michigan that were created from the public domain. In New York, Pennsylvania, and some of the New England States and other States, there have been established State, county and town forests, but the total acreage is small compared to the need. A tremendous increase in publicly owned forests is necessary if forestry is to make material progress.

Those nations that are doing the most in forestry have one-third to two-thirds of their timber land in public ownership. It requires time to grow trees and many individuals hesitate to undertake it, but the nation or State can wait for the return. Surely no State can afford to have its land lie non-productive and idle, no matter who owns it. In some States there are millions of these acres that have come back to the States for non-payment of taxes. The sooner they are placed under administration and made to produce timber, whether for ordinary wood products, or as regulators of water run-off and other uses, the quicker will they become an asset, instead of a liability, as they are at present. Some States realize the situation and are going ahead with very definite forestry programs.

There is a personal responsibility for each individual to assume in this forest problem, whether he owns timbered land or idle land, that should be made productive, or if he is to be depended upon to help keep fire out

of the woods. This arch-demon fire, the great enemy of the forest, runs rampant over about 40,000,000 acres of forest and woodland each year. He is turned loose largely through the carelessness of man, and therefore can be prevented. Fires in the woods are started by careless hunters, fishermen and campers or by autoists who throw out cigarette and cigar stubs or unextinguished matches. Much is being done by the States and nation to discover and extinguish these fires, but much depends upon the individual citizen to see that fires do not start. Most people do not realize that they can help in this matter and education on all phases of the forestry question is needed in the schools, both grade and high schools and the colleges, especially the teachers' colleges. Here may be taught the rudimentary elements of forestry, what forestry practice means to all the people, and why fire, this greatest enemy of the forest, should be kept out of the woods, and how that can be done. Prevention is easier and less expensive than cure. Surprising as it may seem there are still people who purposely burn the woods, their own and other peoples', under the impression that fire helps to get rid of boll weevil, cattle tick or disease germs, or that it will improve grazing. It does none of these things effectively, and actually injures the grass, killing good grasses, leaving the poorer grasses on which stock cannot gain, to come on and crowd out the nutritious stock foods.

Tests prove that cattle and sheep run the year through on burned lands, do not put on the fat or make the growth they do when grazed on unburned lands.

But the damage fire does is much greater than killing good grasses on these 470,000,000 acres of forest and potential forest land. It kills or injures big trees and destroys little trees, thus reducing the value of the present forest and preventing a new forest from growing. It burns up the leaves, twigs and decaying wood on the floor of the forest, material so necessary to prevent erosion, regulate water run-off and build up the soil and keep it moist and soft. Yes, it burns the vegetable soil itself that has been accumulating these thousands of years, and is so necessary for plant and tree growth. Leaves in an oak forest contain \$3.00 to \$4.00 worth of nitrogen per acre per year and a pine forest drops needles containing more than \$3.00 worth of nitrogen per acre per year. The timber needs this nitrogen if it is to continue to grow, and the farm crops need it if the land is to be cleared and cultivated. In clearing land for farming, nothing should be burned that can be plowed under, and it is much preferable to pile the coarse material and let it decay and make rich soil, than to burn it, even in piles.

Fire does more, it kills game animals, rabbits, 'coons, 'possums, foxes, squirrels and even deer and other big game. It burns birds' nests and even the birds themselves, and destroys the food and shelter of those that survive. It destroys shade over the streams and destroys the fish food. But still further, fire fills the air with acrid smoke, blackens the countryside, leaving death and destruction, and makes it ugly and unattractive to local citizen and tourist. No one delights in a burned and desolate countryside. And finally, by repeated burning, it brings about desert con-

ditions, desolate wastes shunned by man, bird and beast, left as a harbor for destroying insects and other pests. Some of the deserts of the world are man made, as witness; the plains of Jericho, parts of Syria, Persia, China, and North Africa. Repeated fires and continuous overgrazing for hundreds of years, over large areas, bringing about constant winds and erratic climatic conditions, in general, will make a desert of any country. There are places in the United States where this is already apparent.

It is the duty of every individual to rise and smite this devouring, devastating fire demon and drive him from the land. The very future welfare of our country is at stake. Trees are closely associated with the life of man, and without them he can not exist. Forests not only furnish the visible economic material so necessary for his comfort, regulate streams and water run-off, and prevent erosion, but they temper our heat and cold and have a part in the amount of moisture that falls in the interior of our country. They furnish shade and rest for those weary in body, mind and soul. In 1928 our National forests alone were visited by 23,000,000 people, and the State, county, town and city forests drew their quota of those seeking the benefits of the wooded places.

For rest and peace we seek the quiet of the dense forest or the refreshing shade of the grove or roadside tree, where we can watch the woods creatures move about and hear the wind in the trees.

Trees everywhere are a great blessing whether in the city, along the country road or in the deep woods. With them the world is wholesome and beautiful and life is a joy. Mary Carolyn Davies has said:

"Forests are made for weary men,
That they may find their souls again,
And little leaves are hung on trees
To whisper of old memories,
And trails with cedar shadows black
Are placed there just to lead men back
Past the pitfalls of success,
To boyhood peace and happiness."